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Vanden Auweele, Dennis

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# Schopenhauer and the Later Schelling in Dialogue on Mythology and Religion\*

*Dennis Vanden Auweele / University of Leuven and  
University of Groningen*

In order to have a fruitful dialogue, all participants ought to agree on some things and disagree on others. Without some agreement, there is no vantage point from which to start the conversation; without some disagreement, the dialogue might as well be a monologue. Do the later Schelling and Schopenhauer meet these criteria? More specifically, are their respective analyses of the allegorical (Schopenhauer) or tautegorical (Schelling) truth of religion/mythology sufficiently promising for mutual enrichment? The differences between, on the one hand, the atheist and pessimist Schopenhauer and, on the other hand, the Christian apologist and idealist Schelling seem obvious enough. But both authors entertain certain interesting similarities, such as, on the one hand, their opposition to Hegelian dialectical philosophy and, on the other hand, their relationship to Romanticism.

Hegel's philosophy sought to reconcile the difference between Enlightenment rationality and Romantic feeling. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), he mediates—and thus sublates the opposition between—the inwardness of Romanticism and the rationalism of the Enlightenment. For him, Romanticism's appeal to art and religion is, equally as Enlightenment rationalism, an expression of reason and *Geist*. This means that Hegel recognizes the distinction between religion and philosophy but reads both of these as expressions of the same spirit. Around the time Hegel first published his most comprehensive account of this philosophical reconciliatory project in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817), two thinkers, Schopenhauer and the later Schelling, already expressed serious hesitations with regard

\* I would like to extend my gratitude to Jonathan Head and the reviewers of the *Journal of Religion* for extensive comments. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the University of Southampton. Special thanks to Elseltjn Kingma, David Woods, and Christopher Janaway for their feedback.

to the commensurability of religion and philosophy. But perhaps they were only stragglers that aimed to resist the onslaught of Hegelian dialectic.<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps their perspectives on a “dark origin” of reality, which finds potent expression in art, religion, and mythology, pierce through a certain Hegelian naïveté.<sup>2</sup> This opposition to Hegelian dialectic can easily be interpreted as an elevation of Romanticism over the Enlightenment. Indeed, the later Schelling and Schopenhauer are united in their respective link to Romanticism. Josiah Royce assigned the sobriquet “prince of the Romantics” to Schelling, and Schopenhauer’s most well-known pupil, Friedrich Nietzsche, read Schopenhauer as a Romantic who exalted art and feeling over philosophical reflection.<sup>3</sup> Whether or not Schopenhauer and Schelling actually blend in with Romanticism would largely depend on one’s understanding of Romanticism.<sup>4</sup> Whatever way it is read, Schelling and Schopenhauer stand, in some sense, in a symbiotic relationship to Romanticism.

<sup>1</sup> References to Schopenhauer’s work follow Arthur Hübscher’s edition: Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke in 7 Bänden*, ed. Arthur Hübscher (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1937). The translation is, where available, taken from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Arthur Schopenhauer: The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, ed. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), cited as WWV1; *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), cited as BGE; *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. David Carus and Robert Aquila (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011), cited as WWV2; and *Parenga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Adrian Del Caro and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), cited as PP2. References to Schelling’s work follow the edition of Schelling’s son, Karl Friedrich August: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1856–64). The translation is taken from F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1936), cited as HF; *The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason Wirth (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), cited as AW; *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, trans. Bruce Matthews (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), cited as GPP; and *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), cited as HCM.

<sup>2</sup> The later Schelling’s relationship to German Idealism has been especially prone to controversy. Some think of him as defending a point of view totally alien to German Idealism, as well as his very own “System of Transcendental Idealism” (1800): Horst Fuhrmans, “Der Ausgangspunkt der Schellingschen Spätphilosophie,” *Kant-Studien* 48 (1956–57): 302–23; Xavier Tillet, *Schelling: Une philosophie de devenir* (Vrin: 1970). Others argue that the later Schelling singled out certain aspects of reality that were underappreciated in German Idealism, without thereby necessarily standing outside of German Idealism. Lothar Knatz describes this as “Nicht hinter Kant zurück, aber über Kant hinaus” (*Geschichte, Kunst, Mythos: Schellings Philosophie und die Perspektive einer philosophischen Mythostheorie* [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999], 14). See also Walter Kasper, *Das Absolute in der Geschichte* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1965); Walter Schulz, *Die Vollendung des Deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Stuttgart: Neske, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale and ed. Daniel Breazale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125–95. See in particular the second preface, “An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” of *The Birth of Tragedy* in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3–12.

<sup>4</sup> I have explored in some detail Schopenhauer’s relationship to Romanticism: Dennis Vanden Auweele, “Schopenhauer and the Paradox of Genius,” *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (2015): 149–68.

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Both above elements also explain why the later Schelling (not the early Schelling) and Schopenhauer are usually read in the context of post-Hegelian rather than post-Kantian philosophy.<sup>5</sup> As a result, they are thought of primarily as dialoging with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche rather than with Kant and each other. Nevertheless, their projects coincide temporally with Hegel's philosophy, and they might have found (if they were willing to recognize this) an ally in each other's works. Without going into any further detail with regard to Hegel's philosophy of religion,<sup>6</sup> this essay will recuperate some of the more salient arguments of Schelling and Schopenhauer that afford religion and mythology a more central and unique function in history and human consciousness. To put it concisely, mythology and religion (as well as art) are for Hegel stages in the self-development of spirit (from subjective over objective toward absolute spirit) that, through a process of historical recognition, are determinately overcome by dialectical philosophy. The later Schelling and Schopenhauer propose a point of view that assigns a more robust function to religion, even if Schelling is the one that carries this point further than Schopenhauer.<sup>7</sup> Religion can achieve something, according to Schopenhauer and the later Schelling, that philosophy cannot: philosophy cannot educate the masses (Schopenhauer); philosophy cannot make us aware of the proto-philosophical aspects of reality (Schelling). Additionally, Schopenhauer and the later Schelling also oppose a certain type of philosophy that is overly concerned with conceptual thought, which Schopenhauer calls dogmatic and Schelling calls negative.

This engagement between the later Schelling and Schopenhauer on religion and mythology in dialogical form compares and clarifies the similarities and differences between their views. To do so, we will discuss (1) the potential lack of truth in mythology for Schelling and Schopenhauer, (2) Schopenhauer's claims of truth through allegory in mythology (as well as in religion), (3) Schelling's objections to this allegorical interpretation, (4) Schelling's positive philosophy that provides the ground for a different interpretation of mythology, (5) Schelling's tautological interpretation of mythology, and (6) Schopenhauer's rejoinder to Schelling.

<sup>5</sup> For a concise treatment of this problem: Marcello Ruta, *Schopenhauer et Schelling, philosophes du temps et de l'éternité: La deuxième voie du post-kantisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014), 35–49; Lore Hühn, "Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten: Überlegungen zur Rolle des Anfangs bei Schelling und Schopenhauer," *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 86 (2005): 55–69.

<sup>6</sup> I have discussed this elsewhere: Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Reconciliation, Incarnation, and Headless Hegelianism," *Faith and Philosophy* 34 (2017): 201–22.

<sup>7</sup> One cautionary note: I will limit my discussion of Schelling to his views regarding mythology and leave revealed religion to the side. The reason for this is that this essay investigates the origin of religion, which for Schelling is historically first present in mythology. As will be dealt with in more detail below, Schelling even believes that the purpose of mythology is to render consciousness receptive to revelation. According to Schopenhauer, the distinction between religion and mythology collapses which allows for his general account of religion to apply to mythology without restraint.

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### I. SCHELLING AND SCHOPENHAUER ON A POTENTIAL LACK OF TRUTH IN RELIGION

The question “Is religion true?” could be taken in two senses. On the one hand, this could query whether the systematic worldview espoused by a particular religion—for example, belief in a single or multiple deities, a moral code, an afterlife, and so on—actually corresponds to the facts. From this perspective, religion might conflict with other systems of thought, such as metaphysics and natural science, that profess a different worldview. I do not find this approach very promising. On the other hand, this question could be rephrased as “Is there truth in religion?” This way, the question of the truth of religion does not query whether a particular religion as a systematic whole consistently corresponds to reality but whether a particular religion gives expression to something truthful even though its propositional message might not correspond to the facts of reality. Different religions and even mythologies might then equally be true without having the same outward message, as long as the inner message gives expression to the same truth. Schopenhauer and Schelling both discuss religion from this latter tack, which not only makes them pay equal attention to Western and Oriental religion, as well as Oriental and Western mythology, but allows them to develop a perspective wherein philosophy, religion, and mythology derive from a similar source.

Schopenhauer makes it unmistakably clear that any religion purporting to be a theoretical system of propositional truths is very far from the truth. When it comes to facts, only philosophy and to a certain extent science is able to provide a compelling and comprehensive account of reality. With respect to religion, Schopenhauer is best known for his full-out assault on theological sophistry in favor of a more sober philosophical perspective on the truth. The sobriety of this perspective derives from its atheist, monist, and naturalist character: no absolute being, no different substances, and no qualitative differences between substances. The will, which gives expression to reality, is the whole of reality. This aspect of Schopenhauer’s philosophy resonated powerfully in Nietzsche’s philosophy, who read Schopenhauer as someone who was intuitively atheist: “The ungodliness of existence counted for him as something given, palpable, indisputable.”<sup>8</sup> None of this requires opposition, merely nuance. To entertain solely this reductive perspective on the appreciation of religion of the misanthropic sage of Frankfurt—a sobriquet coined by John Oxenford in his famous review of Schopenhauer’s work titled “Iconoclasm in German Philosophy” (1853)—is dangerously misleading. While Schopenhauer famously believed that there is but one truth, he was convinced that this truth could be expressed in a myriad of forms. Therefore, Schopenhauer does not out of hand reject religious or even artistic language to convey this basic truth. Nondogmatic philosophy is simply

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 219.

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the superior mode of presentation, but art and religion can equally express this truth in their own unique ways.

The decisive difference between philosophy and religion is primarily to be found in the means of justifying that truth: the former is justified “in itself” while the latter is justified “outside itself” (WWV2, 180); in other words, philosophy is based on “conviction” while religion is based on “faith” (WWV2, 181); in yet other words, philosophy expresses truth “*sensu proprio*” and religion expresses truth “*sensu allegorico*” (WWV2, 183). Obviously, religion cannot admit to its allegorical nature and must present its creeds as literally true. This can be very dangerous to philosophical (and scientific) progress. In his dialogue “On Religion,” Schopenhauer’s mouthpiece Philaethes recognizes that most people require religion to assuage their metaphysical need, but that this does not mean that he ought to respect these “lies”: “I do not see why I should have respect for a pack of lies due to the simple-mindedness of others” (PP2, 343). From this, it can be gathered that Schopenhauer holds that religion often acts as the “antagonist *ex officio*” to human progress since it forbids “a person’s free exploration of the most important and interesting matters, of his very existence” (PP2, 14).

While philosophy and religion can conflict if they entreat on each other’s domain, they are equally enabled to give expression to the same thing by different means. This is so because both emerge in response to a metaphysical need that requires satisfaction. All comprehensive explanations of reality—so religion and philosophy both—are a response to this metaphysical need that emerges because of the confrontation with the finitude of human existence:<sup>9</sup> “It is without doubt the knowledge of death and, along with this, consideration of life’s suffering and hardship that provides the strongest impetus to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of reality” (WWV2, 176). At first, this metaphysical need quite literally means to carry our physical needs—mainly self-preservation—beyond the physical. Our metaphysical need then gives rise to metaphysics, which is “all supposed cognizance that goes beyond the possibility of experience, and so beyond nature or things in their given phenomenon, in order to inform us as to how, in one or another sense, they are conditioned” (WWV2, 180). This means that religion and philosophy both arise initially to provide a way to quell the fear of death by providing some form of “survival after death” (WWV2, 177).

Ideally, this metaphysical need would be quelled by truthful metaphysics. The ultimate, ideal purpose of philosophy and religion is the same, namely, “to be true” (WWV2, 209). But if metaphysics arises in response to a need, does this not by definition obstruct the possibility for it to be truthful? For anyone familiar with Schopenhauer’s more comprehensive, pessimistic phi-

<sup>9</sup> A lot more can be said about this metaphysical need. For more extensive discussion of its pedagogic function, see Jonathan Head, “Schopenhauer on the Development of the Individual,” *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (2016): 427–46.



osophy, such a metaphysical need seems like just one more expression of our will to life, and therefore more alike to a will-o'-the-wisp than a savior! Schopenhauer is best known for his pessimism, first outlined in sections 56–59 of *The World as Will and Representation, Volume 1*: human life is disproportionately filled with suffering. A full outline of Schopenhauer's pessimism is beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>10</sup> The general message is that human beings are the expression of infinite will, which translates into the infinite amount of objects to which the human will is inclined. To desire means to be in pain, and desire is never ending, so pain is never ending. This means that "human life is dispositionally incapable of true happiness" (WWV1, 381). Schopenhauer's works are saturated with rich images that vivify what this means: "We are fundamentally something that should not be" (WWV2, 579); "the life of every individual is in fact always a tragedy" (WWV1, 380); "a person is a being whose existence is a punishment and a penance" (WWV2, 663); "human beings are on the whole worthless" (WWV1, 415).

But this lamentable condition derives from our willingness to be a willing thing. Should we forfeit our desires—something in which religion, ethics, and art can provide a helping hand—we could find ourselves in a better state. This is what Schopenhauer calls the denial (*Verneinung*) of the will to life: ethics, art, religion, and philosophy can affect our will so powerfully that they act as a narcotic on willing. The conative force of the will is nullified and we no longer suffer. But if the denial of the will is the proper recourse for human beings, how can the satisfaction of a metaphysical need, which is still a need (*Bedürfnis*), be a solution? Precisely from this perspective, Schopenhauer advances the thesis that there could well be a lack of determinate truth in any metaphysics, whether philosophical or religious. Since these initially emerge as fabrications responding to a subjective need, they are not an objective representation of reality, whether an existential or factual truth.

What is even worse, these metaphysical fabrications tend to be optimistic. This means that they suggest that human agents are able to arrive at happiness, whether through satisfaction of their desires (eudaimonism) or through certain moral works (Catholicism). This problem is not unique to religion since (dogmatic) philosophy can similarly be an obstacle to human progress if it is optimistic. The predominant belief in philosophical optimism is that through the exercise of the natural mode of behavior, specifically by fulfilling particular desires, the human agent reaches a unobjectionable state of being, namely, happiness.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For insightful notes, see Mark Migotti, "Schopenhauer's Pessimism and the Unconditioned Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995): 643–60; Christopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Pessimism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 318–43.

<sup>11</sup> Religion could then be untrue if it gives expression to optimism. I have detailed elsewhere what exactly renders a religion optimistic or pessimistic to Schopenhauer. A pessimistic religion (1) regards existence as punishment, (2) denies the soteriological potential of works (rational or moral), (3) promotes compassion as a stepping stone to asceticism, (4) surrounds its dog-

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The most important problem that Schopenhauer detects with regard to religion has not so much to do with its nature, but in being prone to optimism. Philosophy has the same problem. Schopenhauer does add that the dogmas of religions are often inculcated early in someone's life so that they are very hard to extricate (PP2, 346), while philosophical ideas are more malleable and thus more given to change (PP2, 366–67). The education given by optimistic religions is dangerous since they “oppose the progress of humanity in cognizance of the truth [and] must be considerably pushed to one side” (WWV2, 185). Schopenhauer is here thinking particularly of Judaism and Islam. The central difference between religions lies not in their outward clothing—such as whether they are theistic, deistic, pantheistic, polytheistic, and so on—but their inner messages that either attune to natural optimism or eschew this for a more pessimistic point of view: “The fundamental difference in religions lies in whether they are [an expression of] optimism or pessimism” (PP2, 412; cf. WWV2, 187–88). Any optimism in religion is then a sign of a determinate lack of truth in that religion.

Schopenhauer does not really account for this, but while religions emerge in response to a metaphysical need, they can give allegorical expression to pessimism. In the final section of this essay, I return to this issue and suggest a similarity with Schopenhauer's aesthetics. If religion expresses pessimism, they can practically cultivate an inner attitude of pessimism and compassion that can work to the benefit of humanity. This is why Philaethes's conversation partner Demopheles interjects that the practical or moral function of religion must take precedence over any theoretical or speculative function: “Above all it is important to restrain the brutal and lowly dispositions of the masses” (PP2, 350). In response, Philaethes enumerates numerous examples of how religion has been to the moral detriment of humanity (PP2, 370–72). They ultimately reach the consensus that religion can work to the benefit of humanity but often has not (PP2, 382).

Schelling engages the issue of the potential lack of truth in religion from a seemingly unrelated perspective, but he objects equally to making mythology about factual truth: “It is not at all the things with which man deals in the mythological process by which consciousness is moved, but rather it is the *powers arising in the interior of consciousness itself*” (HCM, 207). When Schelling first addresses whether there is truth in mythology, he is drawn to dialogue with the view which he calls the “poetic” (*Dichtung*). He deals with this view first, because he believes that “all other and more obvious views must first be explained as *impossible*, and it itself must have become the *only possible* one, before we can consider it as grounded” (HCM, 5). To account for the emergence of

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mas with a sense of mystery (against rational religion), and (5) presents its teaching through allegorical message that is not likely to be taken literally. If religion is optimistic, it provides certain illusions that enforce the natural, optimistic disposition in human beings. See Dennis Vanden Auweele, “Schopenhauer on Religious Pessimism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78 (2015): 53–71.



mythology, Schelling believes that the most modest and least demanding point of view has to be entertained first. If and only if this view is not satisfactory, then we may entertain a more complex view, namely, a philosophy of mythology.

The poetic view of religion suggests that “the mythological representations have been generated not with the intent to *assert* or *teach* something but rather only in order to satisfy a (of course, at first incomprehensible) poetic drive for invention” (*HCM*, 11–12). This view holds that poets, such as Homer and Hesiod, are the inventors of Greek mythology. This view would deny any truth potential in mythology by relegating it to mere storytelling. Schelling is, however, quick to discard this view. He does so by drawing a distinction between the origin of myth in mythic consciousness, and the poetic or mythological representation of those myths. In fact, it might be accurate to claim that poets are the fathers of mythology, that is, the systematic representation of mythic stories, but not of myth itself. In Schelling’s view, “nothing can simply be poetically invented, simply be plucked from the air” (*HCM*, 12).

The poetic view of mythology would claim that individuals simply invented, on the spot, mythological stories. Far more likely seems the view that the poets responded to something that was already communicated in an oral tradition, which signals that myth was already present in human consciousness prior to being written down and even prior to being conscious of myth. At one point, myth was experienced and lived rather than written down and debated. For Schelling, this means that mythology was “thematically present prior to both poets [Herodotus and Hesiod], [even if] only in a dark consciousness” (*HCM*, 17). Poetry is not the origin of myth, but the way in which myth emerge out of the darkness of mythic consciousness. As Schelling eloquently notes, “the dark foundry, the first forging place of mythology, lies beyond all poesy [*Poesie*]” (*HCM*, 18). From this it can be gathered that believing that poetry is the cause of myth means reversing the causal connection between poetry and myth: “Poesy could indeed be the natural end and even the necessarily immediate product of mythology; however, as actual poetry (and to what end would it serve to speak of a poetry *in potential?*) it could not be the generative ground, the source of the representations of the gods” (*HCM*, 20–21).<sup>12</sup> At one point, Schopenhauer provides a more positive ex-

<sup>12</sup> An additional argument provided by Schelling to dismantle the claim that poets invented mythology from scratch is that the different mythologies of the world are highly similar (*HCM*, 22–25). This makes sense: if mythology arises from a universal source, it is bound to show similarities (my gratitude to Jonathan Head for pointing this out to me). This also explains why Schelling and Schopenhauer were both enthusiastic readers of Eastern mythology. Truthfully, they could only really get to a fairly limited level of understanding of other traditions compared to our contemporary awareness of world religions and mythology. The similarities they then detect between these traditions might be due to their enthusiasm. For instance, Schopenhauer’s claims such as “Buddha’s *Samsara* and *Nirvana* are identical to the two cities of Augustine” (*PP2*, 391) or “the doctrine of *Zendavesta*, from which Judaism is known to stem” (*PP2*, 402) or “the New Testament . . . must somehow be of Indian origin” (*PP2*, 404) are to be taken *cum grano salis*.

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pression of the poetic view of mythology which is connected to his allegorical interpretation of mythology and religion: "The mythology of the Greeks has from the beginning provided material for allegorical interpretation, because it invites this by delivering schemata for visualizing almost every fundamental idea, indeed, in a certain sense it contains the archetypes of all things and relationships, which, precisely as such, shine through always and everywhere; after all, it arose actually from the playful drive of the Greeks to personify everything" (*PP2*, 434–35; cf. *PP2*, 384–85). In his view, the artistic and poetic drive of the Greeks was so powerful that it naturally extended itself to personify philosophical and moral concepts. Schopenhauer therefore allows for the aesthetic drive to be the prime ground of mythology without reducing mythology to mere artistic fancy. This more charitable view of the poetic interpretation will return at the end of this essay, but this recourse is not the path that Schelling will follow. Schopenhauer and Schelling allow for there to be something truthful expressing itself in mythology/religion. While Schopenhauer allows that many religions might be devoid of truth (particularly Judaism and Islam), Schelling will attempt to show how there is a kernel of truth in any mythology. This strategy seems, up to this point, remarkably similar to Hegel's philosophy. The decisive difference will exist in the content of that truth. For Hegel, the truth is the self-development and coming to self-consciousness of spirit; for the later Schelling and Schopenhauer, the truth is a proto-philosophical act (not thought) of reality emerging from the irrational. Schelling and Schopenhauer differ, however, in how this comes to pass. For Schopenhauer, religions give allegorical expression to truth, while Schelling attempts to show how mythology tautegorically expresses the dark confines of human consciousness. And, "the primordial material onto which all of this crystallized, consists of occurrences and events that belong to an entirely different order of things (not only than the historical, but also the human one), the heroes of which are gods, an apparently indeterminate lot of religiously venerated personalities who form amongst themselves a particular world" (*HCM*, 6–7).

### II. SCHOPENHAUER ON TRUTH THROUGH ALLEGORY IN RELIGION

Schopenhauer and Schelling both allow for truth to express itself through religion or mythology. How exactly does this then occur? According to Schopenhauer, the truth of pessimism expresses itself allegorically and symbolically in religion while it does so by means of argument in philosophy. Truthful philosophy is sustained by argument but builds upon an intuitive, prerational awareness (a point Schopenhauer shares with Schelling). Especially suited to the unenlightened masses, "the various religions are simply different schemata in which the people grasp and visualize the truth that in itself is incomprehensible to them" (*PP2*, 344).

The aforementioned metaphysical need of people can attempt to find recourse in certain optimistic religions that actually grant survival after death; or, what is better, the metaphysical need can be quelled by a more informed means. Schopenhauer believes that any attempts to reach happiness through the sating of desires will necessarily lead to continued unhappiness because of the limitless number of particular desires (because the infinite nature of desire as such) and the will's insistence on willing, often manifesting as boredom. Rather than remaining involved in this circuitry of pain and boredom, pessimism provides the means to escape this circle. This is done by inducing a bit of knowledge that numbs the root of desire.<sup>13</sup> Certain pessimistic religions have attuned to this view of reality and accordingly have their inner message attuned to it, which receives expression in stories, allegories, and symbols.

An example might be helpful here. Schopenhauer argues that all of reality is essentially will and all particular individuals are the expression of this will. Particularity and individuality is then an illusion brought about by the principle of individuation. Differences between individuals are ultimately not real. By somehow incorporating this bit of knowledge (Schopenhauer remains mysterious about this), a human agent can cease to make the egoist distinction between himself and others; as a result, the agent experiences the needs and the sufferings of the other to an equal extent as his or her own. From this emerges compassion, which induces agents to undo the suffering of the other. The way I understand it, a pessimistic religion might give expression to this philosophical truth as follows. In Christianity, human beings are children of the same heavenly father. Much like love and compassion are easily and naturally experienced for one's family members, so we should extend our notion of family to all human beings, even our enemies. By incorporating this religious story, the allegorical truth behind it might, similar to the philosophical argument, induce loving kindness and compassion among human beings. In Schopenhauer's view, Buddhism supersedes Christianity in its moral fiber because Buddhists extend the mystical unity of reality toward animals as well (*BGE*, 245–46).

Philosophy and religion have radically different manners of expression that ought to restrict themselves to their proper audiences. This is also why Schopenhauer feels the need to distance himself from so-called philosophy of religion (*Religionsphilosophie*). In his view, this perspective confuses the modes of operation of religion and philosophy: "So-called philosophy of religion, which, as a kind of Gnostic wisdom, attempts to interpret given religions and to explain what is true *sensu allegorico* through something that is true *sensu proprio*" (*WWV2*, 185). Schopenhauer does not object to finding a proper

<sup>13</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to develop in full the intricacies and paradoxes of Schopenhauer's ethics and soteriology. For further discussion, see Neil Jordan, *Schopenhauer's Ethics of Patience: Virtue, Salvation, and Value* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2009); Gerard Mannion, *Schopenhauer, Religion and Morality: The Humble Path to Ethics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

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truth in religion, only to obscuring philosophical and religious language. Religion is allegorically true, philosophy is literally true. Schopenhauer disarms the discussion between what he calls “supernaturalists” and “rationalists” from this perspective. The former miss the allegorical nature of religion by taking it as literally true: “[They] want to maintain [Christian doctrine] without subtraction, as it were with hide and hair; thereby, they are in a difficult situation in view of the knowledge and the general culture of the age” (WWV2, 184). The latter similarly miss the allegorical nature of religion by rationalizing its hyperbolic elements (such as divine election, grace, etc.): “The latter, by contrast, seek to interpret away [*hinauszuexegesieren*] everything specifically Christian; thereby they retain something that is not true either sensu proprio or sensu allegorico, but rather a mere platitude, virtually Judaism, or at most shallow Pelagianism, and, worst of all, base optimism that is entirely foreign to Christianity proper” (ibid.). The perspective then taken by Schopenhauer’s Demopheles is that religion “does not stand opposed to truth, for it itself teaches truth,” namely, by serving as a “mythical vehicle” for a truth otherwise inaccessible to the masses (PP2, 352). Demopheles is a “friend of the people” because he realizes that the metaphysical need of human agents must be quenched; and, since there are those “of whom thinking cannot be asked” (WWV2, 184), they must have a recourse in something more palpable to their limited intellect than the abstract argumentation of philosophy. If not, they might be utterly bereft of any recourse from the misery of life. Philalethes fears, however, that this metaphysical need is prone to abuse and the best option would be to avoid any deceit whatsoever, even when well-intended: “It boils down to truth disguised as lie . . . what kind of dangerous weapon is put in the hands of those who obtain the authority to use untruth as a vehicle for truth” (PP2, 353). Rather than condemning the mass of mankind to remain in a position of tutelage and servitude to religion, Philalethes adamantly emphasizes the following: “Meanwhile we do not want to give up hope that mankind will one day reach the point of maturity and culture where they are on the one hand capable of producing and on the other hand of adopting the true philosophy” (PP2, 357). Demopheles counters, however, by pointing out that Philalethes “[has] no adequate concept of the miserable capacity of the masses” (ibid.). This leads the two to come to the consensus that religion has two faces, namely, a kind one that would provide succour to the masses incapable of philosophical insight but also a nasty one that would impede or even halt intellectual progress by disregarding religion’s allegorical nature (PP2, 382).

### III. SCHELLING’S COUNTERPOINT TO THE ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

Schopenhauer thus holds that religion can be a kind of surrogate or ersatz philosophy by expressing metaphysical truth through allegory and symbol.

Interestingly, Schopenhauer then seems to argue that mythology, religion, and philosophy, at their best obviously, derive from a similar root—namely, a desire grown from the metaphysical need of mankind. While obviously coming rather close to Hegel's point of view in this, Schopenhauer clearly distinguishes himself from his hated adversary by emphasizing that the grim truth behind religion is not progress toward rationality. In extension of this, Schopenhauer argues for the perennial infirmity of most of humanity and the continued need for religion.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Schopenhauer emphasizes that older religions/mythologies tended toward being closer to true wisdom (which is the opposite of Hegel's argument): "In early ages upon the present surface of the earth, things were different, and those who were considerably closer than we are to the origination of the human race and to the original source of organic nature also possessed, partly, greater energy in their powers of intuitive cognizance and partly a more accurate attunement of mind, by which they were capable of a purer, immediate apprehension of the essence of nature" (*WW2*, 178). Schelling refuses to take mythology and religion as allegorical expressions of a truth more soberly expressed in philosophy. While Schelling agrees with Hegel that all religions are able to give expression to a certain truth (contra Schopenhauer), he believes (similarly as Schopenhauer) that this truth is not rational. In other words, while the philosophical expression of the truth of *Wille* (Schopenhauer) or *Geist* (Hegel) is clearly the *summum* of, respectively, Schopenhauer's and Hegel's philosophy, Schelling more cautiously allows mythology and religion to be the expression of a profound truth, of which only they can be the expression. This truth is proto-philosophical rather than philosophical (this will be unpacked below).

Schelling describes the allegorical interpretation of mythology as follows: "Truth is in mythology, but not in mythology as such; especially since it is the doctrine and history of the *gods*, and thus seems to have a religious meaning. Thus mythology says or seems to say something different than is meant" (*HCM*, 23). In order to counter this interpretation, Schelling advances the thesis that mythology is "not *allegorical*; it is *tautegorical*. To mythology the gods are actually existing essences, gods that are not something *else*, do not *mean* something else, but rather *mean* only what they are" (*HCM*, 195–96).

To discredit the allegorical view, Schelling advances a number of arguments.<sup>15</sup> First, if the actual, inner essence of mythology consists in the ex-

<sup>14</sup> On some rare occasions, Schopenhauer displays unusual optimism with regard to intellectual progress in Western society. In a later work of his, he expresses faith that humanity will progressively come to terms with the denial of the will to life as the proper mode of living: "Now since we have concluded from the results of my serious philosophy (in contrast to the mere professorial or comic philosophy) that the will's turning away from life is the ultimate aim of temporal existence, we must assume that we shall all be gradually guided in that direction in a way individually suited to us, thus often through long detours" (*PPI*, 236).

<sup>15</sup> Schelling was unaware of Schopenhauer's allegorical interpretation of religion and mythology. Obviously, Schopenhauer was not the first and will not be the last to advance a thesis

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pression of another truth—whether moral, philosophical, or scientific—then it must necessarily follow that the ultimate purpose of mythology is “more atheistic than theistic” and “does not merely want to know nothing of gods, but rather that [the author of mythology’s] *intent* is even *polemical*, directed against already present representations of the gods” (*HCM*, 39–40). By this, Schelling means to say that mythology would not have been intended or even directed at actual belief in supernatural entities or at irrational belief at all. Instead, mythology would be the veiled expression of a rational truth. But if mythology’s intentions are really this irreligious, how could it possibly inspire so much religious zeal? Even Schopenhauer recognizes the religious zeal in those religions, such as Graeco-Roman paganism, that have little pessimism at their foundation (*PP2*, 384–85). Moreover, why would a philosophy make use of transcendent beings in its allegorical representation of philosophical truth? Would it not be far easier, and give less cause for abuse, if a more or less naturalistic worldview were professed in mythology? This is not the case, which already makes the allegorical interpretation problematic.

To this assertion, Schopenhauer might reply that the fantasy of human beings easily takes flight. A whole host of religions actually get a number of things plain wrong and attempt to sate the metaphysical need by means of trite optimism. Schopenhauer suggests then to counter this problem by advocating that those religions that “oppose the progress of humanity in cognizance of the truth . . . must be considerably pushed to one side” (*WWV2*, 185). This would mean that belief in supernatural entities is a part of religion that is best forgotten (which is another reason why Schopenhauer preferred Buddhism over Hinduism). He is then particularly harsh on Greek and Roman mythology, which is “merely a game of the imagination and an invention of poets using folk fairy tales” (*PP2*, 385). Schopenhauer seems aware that myth is not invented by poets, but he fails to recognize that these “folk fairy tales” have a truth value beyond the allegorical. What is more, if Schopenhauer were to dismiss all mythology with one broad stroke, this would go counter to his assertions, quoted at the beginning of this section, that older religions tended more forcibly toward truth. When one advances further into the origins of mythology, one finds a plethora of actual, religious belief in transcendent beings.

A second argument that Schelling advances against the allegorical point of view is that this implies that the authors of mythology were “a people freed

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of this kind. The proponents of this theory that Schelling identifies are the Greek philosopher Euhemerus, Francis Bacon, the philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne, and his successor Gottfried Hermann. These authors developed very complex and intricate theories that allow mythology to blend smoothly with morality, philosophy, or natural science. In the end, Schelling simply points out (addressing Hermann in particular) that some of this “so exceeds all plausibility that we gladly refrain from following the esteemed author in the further course of his explanation” (*HCM*, 42).



by the philosophers from an already present religious superstition" (*HCM*, 40). Accordingly, for the allegorical interpretation to work, philosophy has to be logically prior to mythology or would have at least emerged simultaneously with mythology. These authors then had the noble intention to educate the masses through stories and parables, but Schelling somewhat cynically adds, "the intentions failed, as the inventors indeed present their teaching to the people, but inexplicably neglect—vis-à-vis a people already full of ideas about invisible beings standing behind natural phenomenon—to offer beforehand an explanation of the merely grammatically intended personifications: so that in the end the people are left to their own devices to find the true meaning; or, misunderstanding it, only *to deceive themselves*" (*HCM*, 41–42). The authors of mythology would have been utterly unsuccessful in their pursuit, which inclines toward the point of view that the intention behind mythology was drastically different than what the allegorical interpretation purports it to be. Instead, the potential allegorical meaning of religion was added later on, or might even have served to reshape and rationalize mythology to be a better fit with this alleged allegorical message.

Schelling notes that a mythic, dark consciousness where mythology was lived rather than understood must necessarily precede mythology and philosophy. Even in mythology, there is already introduced a distance between that original consciousness by introducing logos in the mythos. But the actual origin, or what Schelling calls, the "dark foundry" (*HCM*, 17) of mythology lies beyond all philosophy: "Just as little as poetry did philosophy precede mythology" (*HCM*, 46). In fact, Schopenhauer himself notes how religion and mythology seem to have preceded philosophy everywhere: "Whereas religion everywhere gained a head-start on philosophy" (*PP2*, 355).<sup>16</sup> Philosophy is therefore not the origin of mythology, but rather one potential exit from mythic consciousness, the poetic being a different one: "The two poets Homer and Hesiod, so very different from each other . . . designated the *two* equally possible—not *beginnings* but—*exits* from mythology" (*HCM*, 46).

#### IV. SCHELLING'S ALTERNATIVE EXPLICATION AND POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

Schelling provides an alternative explication of the origin of mythology. Thus far, we have seen how Schelling opposes the point of view that mythology is a pure fabrication (the poetic view) or that it is a philosophy/science in disguise (the allegorical view). His own view must then necessarily navi-

<sup>16</sup> Given his understanding of the metaphysical need, Schopenhauer seems committed to the view that philosophy and religion arise simultaneously. This does seem factually wrong, which he recognizes in *PP2*. This statement could then read that Schopenhauer believes that religion is more popular and accessible than philosophy (I thank Jonathan Head for pointing this out). Given the context of this quote, I think this interpretation indeed charitable, but somewhat unlikely.

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gate between viewing religion as either intentionally espousing philosophical truth or as a mere fabrication to satisfy the artistic drive. In his view then, mythology becomes an instinctive creation that responds to the inward revelation of transcendence (this will be unpacked below). In his own words, mythology is “the product of an unintentional-intentional, instinctive invention, which on the one hand would hold at a distance from itself everything merely fabricated and artificial, but on the other hand would at the same time allow that the deepest meaning and the soundest relations inherent in mythology be seen as not merely contingent” (*HCM*, 53). Mythology must then be an extension of human nature but not of the rational parts of that nature. This makes mythology true in itself because it gives expression to something real that is not rational, which is what he means by “tautegorical.” Religion (mythology and revelation) becomes for Schelling an aspect of a positive philosophy, of which the insights cannot be expressed using rational concepts.<sup>17</sup> To understand this point of view, a detour is necessary by what he calls his “positive philosophy.”

Schelling delivered his lectures in Berlin on “The Grounding of Positive Philosophy” (1842) around the same time he delivered the lectures on the “Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology” (1842)—he would continue to lecture on the actual “Philosophy of Mythology” until 1851. Here, Schelling expresses the point of view, anticipating Heidegger’s critique of the ontotheological tradition, that modern philosophy has focused almost exclusively—with a few noteworthy moments of the “positive” breaking through—on negative philosophy. Schelling defines negative philosophy as a ‘science of reason’, which details the relationship of concepts to each other and is generated by subjective consciousness (he is mainly thinking of Fichte here). Schelling himself might be complicit in this negative philosophy by initially joining Fichte in trying to systematize transcendental philosophy in his “System of Transcendental Idealism” (1800).

Traditional philosophy, in Schelling’s view, recognized three sources of knowledge, namely, understanding, or *Verstand* (*GPP*, 35–36); experience (*GPP*, 36–37); and reason, or *Vernunft* (*GPP*, 37–38). The latter was instrumental for metaphysics, which is the science of the “absolute supersensible” (*GPP*, 37). The faculty of reason applied the concepts of the understanding to experience so as to provide knowledge of that which exceeds experience: “The former metaphysics was based on the assumption that it is capable, through the application of general concepts and fundamental principles to what was provided in experience, of inferring that which is beyond experience” (*GPP*, 38). This way of doing metaphysics collapsed (Kant), and as a

<sup>17</sup> For a more comprehensive survey of how Schelling believes that philosophy extends itself to religion in a nondogmatic fashion, see Albert Franz, *Philosophische Religion: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit den Grundlegungsproblemen der Spätphilosophie F.W.J. Schellings* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1992), 85–93.

result the human mind found itself in a dilemma: "Either [the human mind] must abandon metaphysics altogether, that is, all knowledge of that which lies outside and beyond experience, or must search for another way to arrive at it" (*GPP*, 42).

After Kant, philosophers have attempted to bring back all sources of knowledge to one absolute *prius*; namely, the I of absolute consciousness as the "common *prius* of sensibility, of the understanding, and of reason" (*GPP*, 55). This turned philosophy into an "unconditioned *science of reason*" (*GPP*, 57). But this science of reason is only concerned with the essence or conceptual nature of things, and not with their being or their existence. Negative philosophy reduces the being of things to their essence. From this type of negative, conceptual thinking, there can be no bridge toward being as such. This is illustrated well by Kant's critique of the ontological argument. According to Kant, the ontological argument expresses the relationship between certain concepts; namely, between the concepts of perfection, necessary existence, and God. When the concept of necessary existence is subsumed under the concept perfection, the being to which perfection is ascribed must then also be in possession of the predicate of necessary existence. But this inference merely shows that God, if he exists, must necessarily exist. Thought cannot assign existence by merely conceptual logic because "being is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves."<sup>18</sup>

Anything real must necessarily derive from experience (of whatever kind), which is a point of view shared by Kant, Schelling, and Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer repeatedly states that "a true philosophy cannot be spun out of mere abstract concepts, but instead must be grounded on observation and experience, inner as well as outer. . . . Philosophy must have its source in the intuitive apprehension of the world" (*PP2*, 9). Here, Schelling and Schopenhauer accept the direct, inward revelation of the transcendent. In the second part of the first volume of his *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer claims that human beings are intimately aware of the essence of their own bodies. We directly experience our bodies as "will," without having to make a representation of that body. We have therefore an "awareness" or even "cognition" that is not based on concepts, representations, or even logic. A similar thing happens in Schopenhauer's aesthetics, to which we will return at the close of this essay. Schelling will illustrate this issue by means of what he calls "metaphysical empiricism."

The main difficulty with a merely negative philosophy—especially when it purports to be positive philosophy such as with Hegel which is a "negative [philosophy] driven beyond its limits" (*GPP*, 80)—is that it cannot bridge

<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 567.

toward actual existence, or what Schelling calls Being or God. Schopenhauer makes a very similar claim. Ordinary thought is structured in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason. This principle roughly coincides with what subjective consciousness adds to intuition in Kant's philosophy: time, space, causality, logic, and motivation. Most systems of thought that describe reality are equally governed by this principle, such as mathematics, dogmatic philosophy, and natural science (WWVI, 113–18). Accordingly, these systems of thought can at best describe representational reality, not reality in itself. The latter must, according to Schopenhauer, be totally (*toto genere*) different from the former. Reality in itself is the ground from which representational reality emerges and can therefore not be governed by the principles of representational reality. In order to amount to reality in itself, one must find an awareness that is not conditioned by the principle of sufficient reason. In Schopenhauer's philosophy, this is achieved by introspection, a lesson he learned from Kant: "You could also say that Kant's doctrine makes us realize that we need not look beyond ourselves for the beginning and the end of the world, but rather within" (WWVI, 498).

The similarities with Schelling's argument are uncanny. What Schopenhauer will eventually call "will" as the in-itself of reality (which is merely endless activity or self-expression), is called "Being" (*Seyn*) by Schelling. In 1809, Schelling would however use "will" and "Being" interchangeably: "In the final and highest instance there is no other Being than Will. Will is primordial Being, and all predicates apply to it alone—groundless, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation!" (HF, 350). Schopenhauer did carefully study Schelling's *Freedom-Essay*, but similar thoughts on will can already be found in other thinkers such as Kant. Schelling would argue, like Schopenhauer, that Being cannot be the end result of philosophy, that is, concepts cannot navigate toward Being, but this must necessarily be the starting point of true philosophy. Positive philosophy, which deals with freedom and Being, must necessarily precede negative philosophy. This also implies that the positive—God, will, or Being—cannot be captured by means of the tools of negative philosophy, which is "reason" or the "absolute prius of consciousness." If Being necessarily precedes the system of conceptual thought, then it must necessarily precede the principles of conceptual thought. This means that a priori, conceptual thought has something like a conceptual past that perennially looms over its claims and limits their validity to the present. The past is then that which precedes logical thought; logos itself has an origin beyond and before itself. This dark origin has to be revealed to philosophy and can never be taken up by negative philosophy.

There is thus a dimension to our investigation of reality that upsets any panlogicism or pansubjectivism. Any philosophical system that purports to be without this dimension often finds itself at a loss at decisive points: "But the extralogical nature of existence rebels so decisively against this that even those who, consistent with their concepts, explain the world and even

their own existence as the mere logical consequence of some kind of original necessity do not have the words they want and must rather, forsaking the standpoint of pure thought, reach for expressions that are entirely unsuitable, and indeed impossible, from their standpoint" (*GPP*, 95). A complete philosophy requires both "a science that grasps the essence of things and the content of all being and a science that explains the actual existence of things" (*ibid.*). Thus, Schelling does not dismiss negative philosophy but limits its claims and validity to one aspect of reality by making way for a science that precedes negative philosophy. Schelling notes that in some ancient philosophers this insight came to fruition in their recourse to mythology. For instance, Plato turned in the *Timaeus* to a mythic story for an account of the creation of the world (*GPP*, 96–101). Plato had a healthy appreciation for how true philosophy required a dimension that must appear like madness or mania from the perspective of conceptual thought: "The best things we have come from madness."<sup>19</sup> In his unpublished "The Ages of the World" (the version of 1815), Schelling concurs with this point of view when claiming that "nothing great can be accomplished without a constant solicitation of madness, which should always be overcome, but should never be utterly lacking" (*AW*, 338). Madness can be the result of the direct, inward exposure to the immediate revelation of Being or God—not all senses of madness are as such though. Schopenhauer similarly found that the "genius" (creator of art) often appears as "mad" to normal people (*WWVI*, 219–21)—he would even visit asylums, such as the Berlin Charité, in order to acquaint himself better with madness.

#### V. SCHELLING'S TAUTEGORICAL EXPLICATION OF MYTHOLOGY

When one remains stuck in merely negative philosophy, one is forced to choose between the poetic and the philosophical view of mythology. Such a frame of reference forces philosophical thought to be enclosed upon itself so that every part of it neatly interrelates with every other: either mythology is philosophical truth or it is nonsense. While Schopenhauer is remarkably close to Schelling when it comes to most matters of metaphysics and epistemology, he does seem to hold a "negative" perspective on the function of religion. In his view, religion provides the possibility for systematically enclosing thought upon itself: "The metaphysical need of mankind absolutely requires gratification, because the horizon of our thoughts must be closed" (*PP2*, 355). Schelling recognized a hint of self-enclosure in the negative project of a purely systematic philosophy and as long as thought is unable to move beyond this perspective, it will know nothing of actual Being which informs and enables thought: "Pure thought, in which everything develops of

<sup>19</sup> Plato, "Phaedrus," in *Plato: Complete Works*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff and ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 522.

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necessity, knows nothing of a decision, of an act, or even of a deed" (*GPP*, 173). By decision, act, or deed, Schelling means something that allows pure thought to be. In the next section, we will show that this is not as removed from Schopenhauer as appearances would suggest.

Schelling subscribes to something he slightly misleadingly calls "metaphysical empiricism" (*GPP*, 171–92). This means, quite literally, that the metaphysical manifests itself empirically. It does not do this by a process governed by rational laws (Hegel) or causal logic. The latter mistake was made by Franz Baader's theosophy because it involves God in the emergence of things "as an *actual* chain of events . . . positive philosophy consists precisely in that it rejects all processes in *this sense*, namely in which God would not only be the logical but also the actual result of a process" (*GPP*, 121). One cannot implicate God in a deductive or inferential process, which implies that for Schelling the proof of God lies not in logic or particular experience, but "in all of experience" (*GPP*, 131). Schelling means by this that a comprehensive account of all of experience, not just the sum total of rational thought but also its irrational, extralogical aspects, provides an indication of the nature of absolute being, which Schelling sometimes but not always calls God. This further implies that philosophy will never be able to determinatively prove God, but will always strive to this with the extralogical as a powerful signpost and a necessary companion on that voyage: "This entire philosophy is, therefore, an always advancing knowledge, always nothing other than a philo-sophia, never rigid or stagnant" (*GPP*, 132).

Mythology has an important part to play in this voyage of philosophy. Mythology is positive philosophy, that is, it is able to shed some light on the dark, mythic origin of rational thought. In that capacity, mythology is able to give expression to certain insights which cannot properly or at least initially be expressed conceptually. Schelling draws a number of interesting insights from his engagement with mythology that he could not deduce from conceptual thought. In the "Philosophy of Mythology" lectures, Schelling understands mythology as the way that humanity had sought to understand how reality flowed from transcendence. A (very) brief overview of Schelling's account of this proceeds as follows. According to this doctrine of the potencies (*Potenzenlehre*), there are three potencies: the sheer potency of being, being without limit, and particular being. In *Philosophy of Mythology*, Schelling shows how three world mythologies (Greek, Indian, and Egyptian) all proceed through similar stages in their development where they work through these three different potencies. At first, there is a sense of pantheism of pure mythic consciousness that realizes no distinction between the sacred and the mundane. The overpowering weight of such mythic consciousness is contested by the first potency, which is represented as a male, supreme power (Uranos) that is overthrown or weakened by a female deity (Urania) and finally a young deity arises to reconcile finite being to infinite being (Dionysus). The importance of Schelling's view of mythology obviously does not lie in his



discussion of different world religions (which is highly contestable) but in the fact that he provides compelling evidence that mythology does not belong to science or philosophy. In fact, myth is an irreducible aspect of human consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

Mythic consciousness then necessarily arose as a lived encounter with Being. Throughout its development, humanity has lost that intimate connection to God in mythic consciousness. In Schelling's view, this occurred because different peoples used different languages to denote Being. This means two things: language has distanced us from Being and different languages obscure the fact that all names for Being (Uranus, Gaia, Zeus, God, etc.) denote the very same thing. Humanity has thus moved from an absolute monotheism where myth is lived, to a relative monotheism where there are potentially other gods, to a relative or actual polytheism. Ultimately, through revelation, humanity can move up to an authentic, free sense of monotheism once again.

At this point, we are enabled to provide a comprehensive account of Schelling's view of mythology and religion. These emerge in response to the inward revelation of Being, which cannot properly be communicated by means of conceptual thought. This revelation must then be absolutely free from any possible constraints. For Kant, "absolute freedom" as utter lawlessness "would be an absurdity";<sup>21</sup> strangely enough, Schelling agrees but he allows for the absurd—as that which philosophy cannot convey—to find expression in mythology. Schelling can then be read as arguing for religion to be a perennial companion of human nature, because it gives expression to the proto-rational aspects of the inward revelation of God.

### VI. RETURNING TO SCHOPENHAUER: A WHISPER FROM BEYOND?

Does Schelling's tautegorical account of mythology supersede Schopenhauer's allegorical interpretation of religion? A reading of Schopenhauer's account of artistic creation and intuitive openness to a voice from the beyond actually draws Schopenhauer remarkably close to Schelling's account. First, we will investigate whether Schelling's arguments against the allegorical interpretation hold for Schopenhauer and, second, we will use Schopenhauer's aesthetics to draw him closer to Schelling's theory.

According to Schelling's account of the allegorical interpretation of religion, religion and mythology would be philosopher's invention of a symbolic

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed exegesis of the specifics of Schelling's philosophy of mythology, see Louis Dupré, "The Role of Mythology in Schelling's Late Philosophy," *Journal of Religion* 87 (2007): 1–20; Edward Allen Beach, *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythologie* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals," in *Practical Philosophy: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94.

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narrative that through allegories conveys philosophical truth. Schopenhauer consistently remains ambiguous with regard to who can be named as the actual author of a particular religion. While religions respond to a typically human, metaphysical need, they do not emerge out of the mind of a particular individual. What we do know is that any individual incapable of philosophical learning tends to adopt an already present religion to satisfy the metaphysical need. While religions would then have to emerge at some point out of the mind of some (group of) individual(s), they do not arise out of the mind of every individual. Who or what creates religion? At this point, it should be clear that for Schopenhauer (good) philosophers do not create religion; Schopenhauer does allow for a philosophy to function as a religion, but this would necessarily be a bad philosophy as well as a bad religion (e.g., Hegel). Schopenhauer is adamant that philosophers create philosophy and that this philosophy should give any and all religion a wide berth: "To demand that even a great mind—a Shakespeare, a Goethe—should *implicite bona fide et sensu proprio* adopt the dogmas of some religion as his conviction is like demanding that a giant put on the shoes of a dwarf" (WWV2, 185–86).

If philosophy proper is not the author of a religion, then this already puts some distance between Schopenhauer's view of religion and Schelling's interpretation of the allegorical approach. What increases such distance is the fact that according to the latter, in the allegorical interpretation, religion becomes about an immanent truth such as natural history or morality, and has little to do with gods—above, this was described as the purpose of mythology being more atheistic than theistic. In different terms, the allegorical interpretation would relate the truth of religion to a truth within the confines of negative, conceptual philosophy. For Schopenhauer, this would mean that religion divulges something truthful about representational or immanent reality. In fact, Schopenhauer allows religion to indirectly convey a truth of a metaphysical nature (pessimism), namely, about something that shimmers through representational reality but decisively belongs to a different realm. The truth in religion is for Schopenhauer nonrepresentational, which means that it is not based upon conceptual thought. Conceptual thought de-fines (limits) objects in opposition to one another, while non-representational insight pierces through the principle of individuation into the realm of metaphysical insight. The allegorical interpretation of mythology that was attacked by Schelling often relegated religious truth to scientific or moral truths. Religion does not do this, according to Schopenhauer. It might induce moral behavior, but it does so by teaching a profound metaphysical message.

All of this seems to allow Schopenhauer's interpretation of religion to get rather close to Schelling's point of view. What does, once again, put some distance between Schopenhauer and Schelling is that Schopenhauer allows for the truth in religion to beget philosophical expression (a nonconceptual philosophy, though), while Schelling fears that philosophy in its negative

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character is barren to express this. In other words, for Schelling there is more in revelation than that which can be found already in reason: "If revelation contained nothing more than what is in reason, then it would have absolutely no interest; its sole interest can only consist in the fact that it contains something that exceeds reason, something that is more than what reason contains" (*GPP*, 142–43).

In the Schopenhauerian approach, the author of religion is more properly an artist dealing with matters transcending representation than a dogmatic philosopher dealing with concepts. In fact, Schopenhauer hints to this when he assigns the generation of mythology to the "playful drive of the Greeks to personify everything" (*PP2*, 434–35). While religion might often have served a rather different purpose than art, the emergence of good religion happens in a way not dissimilar to the emergence of art—at least in Schopenhauer's account of the subject. The work of art emerges, according to Schopenhauer, out of the mind of a genius because of his ability to persevere in the pure intuition of the (Platonic) idea that is creatively imagined from worldly inspiration. Of particular importance is the fact that the genius must be brought into a state of inspiration, rather than pursuing artistic creation itself. This means to "stop considering the Where, When, Why and Wherefore of things but simply and exclusively consider the *What* [which is] a peaceful contemplation of the natural object that is directly present [and] we *lose* ourselves in the object completely" (*WWVI*, 210). By the "what" of an object, Schopenhauer refers to the (Platonic) idea which is "the most *adequate objecthood* of the will" (*WWVI*, 206); in other words, the idea is that which lies behind representation as an intermediary between representational and ultimate reality. This means that the artist is directly aware of something that inwardly reveals itself to him in a moment of rapturous inspiration to which he responds with the creation of a piece of art. In the piece of art, the artist is not speaking himself but simply echoing in a more determinate form a whisper he picked up from the beyond. This also explains why Schopenhauer describes the genius primarily as someone possessing surplus sensitivity, rather than knowledge: "Sensibility, objectified in the nerves, is the principal characteristic of humans and is actually that which is human in humans . . . if it is excessively predominant, it yields genius. Therefore the human being of genius is human to a higher degree";<sup>22</sup> "Genius is conditioned by an excess of nervous force and hence of sensibility" (*PPI*, 326).

Schelling's way of understanding the emergence of religion and mythology is highly similar to Schopenhauer's interpretation of artful creation: the human mind is passively overtaken by a real presence from outside and projects this abundance in a determinate system. Schelling described this pro-

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, "On the Will in Nature," in *Schopenhauer on the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. David Cartwright, Edward Erdmann, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 31–32.

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cess as “unintentional-intentional, instinctive invention” (*HCM*, 53), words that resonate with Schopenhauer’s description of the artist’s zeal: “The unpremeditated, unintentional, indeed partly unconscious and instinctive dimension that we have observed from the beginning in works of the *genius* is simply the result of the fact that primal artistic cognition is totally separate and independent of the will, a will-free and will-less cognition” (*PP2*, 446). Both Schelling and Schopenhauer would agree that the emergence of respectively mythology and art has nothing to do with the traditional idea of understanding the world, but with metaphysical insight—either the unity of reality (Schopenhauer) or the progressive self-manifestation of God (Schelling)—being inwardly revealed, of which religion and art are the expressions. So Schelling emphasises that the monotheism that is the necessary end result of the mythological process is not of “the human *understanding*, but rather of human *nature*” (*HCM*, 185).

If Schopenhauer would agree that religion is more alike to aesthetic creation than philosophical invention, then it becomes clear that his own allegorical view of truth in religion shares little with the allegorical view attacked by Schelling. If the process of conceiving religion resembles the intuitive and instinctive inspiration of the genius artist, then Schopenhauer’s account closely resembles Schelling’s view of the emergence of mythology. This means that both the atheist Schopenhauer and the Christian Romantic Schelling believed that religion derived from a similar human characteristic of giving expression to some sort of revelation of a transcendent truth. Schopenhauer perhaps remained somewhat naively optimistic that this truth could find more potent and direct expression in philosophical argument, while Schelling recognized that philosophical concepts are poor compared to the rich poetics of religion.

### VII. CONCLUSION

The dominant tone in the nineteenth century on the relationship of religion to philosophy was that religion, at its best, was an honest attempt at philosophy but was unable to spiritualize to the extent of dialectical philosophy. For some, this meant that religion could be an assistant to (practical) philosophy (Kant), but for others this meant that religion was for all intents and purposes a stage humanity has or should have passed (Hegel, Comte). While Schopenhauer generally fits neatly with a certain direction of post-Kantianism, he does attempt to allocate a different purpose to religion. What is more, religion is able to accomplish certain feats that philosophy cannot achieve, such as cajoling the masses into a proper ethical state of mind. At first appearances, the later Schelling develops a wildly different theory: mythology and religion attune us to an extralogical dimension of reality that would be missed by any philosophy that develops from concepts alone. This essay had as its goal to explore the purpose attributed to religion and mythology in the thought of

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Schopenhauer and the later Schelling. While Schelling clearly opposes an allegorical interpretation of religious truth, his own view of positive philosophy draws close to an aesthetical reinterpretation of Schopenhauer's report with regard to religion. Schopenhauer and Schelling both realize that religion and mythology emerge because of the ambiguous whispers from beyond conceptual reality that attempts to convey a profound truth preceding and prefiguring that reality. Obviously, the specific truth they feel is conveyed in religion differs remarkably.

This ultimately shows that Schopenhauer and Schelling were close to being of the same mind when discussing religion. While Schelling would exert significantly more influence on theology and philosophy in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Schopenhauer equally has something to teach. To single out one thing: the fact that human beings are intuitively aware of something transcending reality does not mean that this something is a benevolent divine or a rationally ordered harmonious cosmic whole. There is, in a sense, a creator of the world, but this does not guarantee that this creator is good.